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Via e-mail: dcrossley@newtonma.gov

Zoning Reform Group
Alderman Deborah Crossley, Chair
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02459

Dear Group Members:

Please accept this letter on behalf of the Newton Housing Partnership (NHP) with regard to the Zoning Reform Group (ZRG). We write to provide our views regarding the ZRG's work relative to housing and hope that you will find our input useful.

First, we commend you for your efforts. Appropriate zoning and land use regulations are critical to the economic health and livability of the City of Newton. Your work is a first-step toward a much-needed comprehensive review and overhaul of such rules. The goals and areas of improvement identified by the Residential Subcommittee are generally thoughtful and appropriate, and essentially without exception the well-supported items in the red dot voting are worthy of support for consideration.

We are especially supportive of the goal to "create and maintain a more varied housing stock to serve a diverse socio-economic population". To that end, we urge the ZRG to prioritize and focus on ways to encourage more multifamily housing in Newton. Currently, Newton has a "one size fits all" process for permitting such housing. Whether 3 units or 300 units, big units or small, village center or not, such development requires a special permit approved by a two-thirds vote of the Board of Aldermen and site plan approval by a majority vote of that same Board.

To better streamline the process, smaller low-impact developments might be treated differently than the others, fitting process to problem. For the less problematic cases approvals could be made by other agencies as allowed by law to handle matters now dependent upon multiple approvals by the Board of Aldermen. By doing so, Newton's zoning would encourage multi-family development as an alternative to large lot single-family houses, which require neither special permits nor site plan review.

If Newton is to be a vibrant, diverse, economically healthy community, we must provide more opportunities for modest housing including apartments, townhouses, and starter homes. Such housing will allow young adults to start out in Newton and older residents to downsize and stay in the community. A focus by the ZRG on multifamily housing will have the most impact in helping Newton obtain the goal of a more varied housing stock that will serve a diverse population.

Our second recommendation pertains to reform actions to be shaped, proposed, and possibly even adopted while the comprehensive review and overhaul of Newton's zoning is ongoing. Some reform actions are of obvious benefit and importance. Adopting them early could serve a number of purposes.

- The City would not have to wait for perhaps a number of years before gaining the benefit those actions could provide.
- Some changes can lay a foundation for later ones, since other actions depend upon them. The kind of hierarchical decision process cited above is an example.
- Much can be learned from the experience of moving change through the approval system. Early actions could provide learning experiences.
- Early achievements could add to the stature of the reform effort, demonstrating that positive change really can be made timefully.

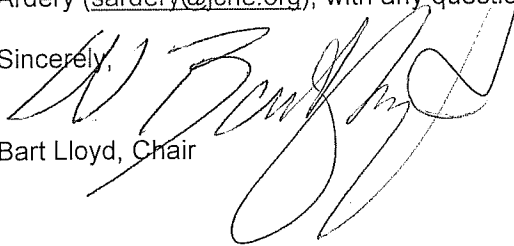
In addition to a wholesale reform, we urge the ZRG to endorse such incremental approaches to reform. To not do so risks creating a multi-year virtual hiatus on zoning improvement approvals.

Were the ZRG to support that approach, the NHP is ready to undertake an effort to assist in the research and development of one or more of the action items that have been identified, such as developing a hierarchical decision process at least for multifamily housing.

The NHP stands ready to assist the ZRG in its important work. Please contact me or any of the members of the NHP's Zoning Sub-Committee, Judy Jacobson (judyjacobson@rcn.com), Phil Herr (ppherr@msn.com) or Sheila Ardery (sardery@iche.org), with any questions.

Sincerely,

Bart Lloyd, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bart Lloyd', is written over the printed name. The signature is fluid and cursive.